

JOSEPH PATAI'S

selected

POEMS

*Translated from the
Hungarian by*

WILLIAM N. LOEW
(NEWYORK)

*With illustrations
by*

E. M. LILIEN
(BERLIN)

Published in

„THE HEBREW STANDARD“

NEWYORK

and in

„THE JEWISH INDEPENDENT“

CLEVELAND O.

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Dr. Joseph Patai

the editor of the foremost Hungarian magazine devoted to the interests and the cause of Judaism in Hungary, a "Moreh Morenuh Horav," a journalist, a leader of thought, a doctor of philosophy, a professor at a High School and College, is also a poet of merit, recognized and highly praised as such in the land of Petőfi.

The monthly magazine edited by him is the Mult és Jövő, which is in English, "Past and Future."

If it be true what the epigram says j. e., that "a people has such newspapers which it deserves to have," then, indeed, high, very high, must be the position of the Magyar Jews. There is probably no Jewry in any part of

the world which can boast of an illustrated magazine of the beauty and splendor—typographically and artistically of the Mult és Jövő, the “Past and Future,” edited at Budapest by Dr. Joseph Patai, devoted to Jewish literature, fine arts, social life and critics. It is a Jewish magazine par excellence; the illustrations are masterpieces of the engraver, etcher, photographer, printer, etc.

Dr. Joseph Patai is, as said before, a Magyar poet of high rank devoting his tuneful lyre almost exclusively to Jewish subjects. His latest volume of verses bears the title, “At the Waters of Babylon” (of course in Magyar), and from this volume took our own William N. Loew the splendid poem “Once Upon a Time,” of which he made for us the above translation.

Dr. Joseph Patai was born in Gyöngyöspata, Hungary, in 1882. At the tender age of eleven he entered a Yeshivah at S. A. Ujhely. Later he has finished the eight years' course of highschool and college in three years time and at twenty-five he graduated as doctor of philosophy at the university. He began his journalistic career at the age of nineteen as associate editor of several leading Jewish and other organs of Hungary. He is professor of literature at the capital city of Magyarland. Apart from his fame as Magyar poet, he ranks high as a Hebrew poet, singing immortal songs in the classic language of the divine psalmist.

»THE HEBREW STANDARD«

Jul. 16. 1916.



Once upon a time

*. . . Once upon a time—my nurse's story ran—
And wrapt I hung upon her lips when she began.
She told me of an east, enchanting, wondrous fair,
Of cypress evergreen, of mountain high, and where
The clouds are kissed by stately cedar tree and palm,
All laves in sunrays roseate and full of balm;
And where the sun and moon shine with a brighter glow
Once upon a time, long, long ago!*

*A mighty king lived in a fort on mountain high,
All of the world with all of his commands comply;
Within an Eden where eternal spring obtained,
The king o'er his proud, leal and happy people reigned.
In reveries lost I listned to the story.
To dust crumbled that throne, and faded all its glory...
With eager yearning list all of the tale to know.
Once upon a time, long, long ago.*

*The years escaped like dreams dreamed in a flitting sleep,
Life took me out to tides o'er which the stormwinds
sweep,
My heart was reached by daggers of derision's jeer,
And filled it with eternal grief and pain severe.
I am crushed by the burden of disdainful scorn,
My soul's peace—battered, shattered and destroyed—
I mourn.
I weep and sob and scream in my tempestuous woe--
Once upon a time, long, long ago!*

*And soft and mellow voices sorrowful relate:
Within their home a people lived in blissful state;
On lotus flower and on nardus tread their feet,
The steps awakening a thousand flowers sweet.
And o'er the thriving land kind fates did never cease
Protectingly to spread the wing of august peare;
Of blissful happiness it had its overflow:
Once upon a time, long, long ago!*

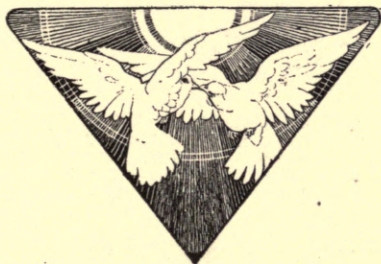
*When thousand dangers held the land in threatening
throes,
When devastating orkan's thund'rous voice arose,
When like dark, stormswept clouds the wrathful
enemy came:
The flag of freedom it held high with loud acclaim,
And bravely fought for it until its latest breath.
All of the earth throbbed when that land was crushed
—to death,
And one great tomb marked that great nation's
overthrow--
Once upon a time, long, long ago.*

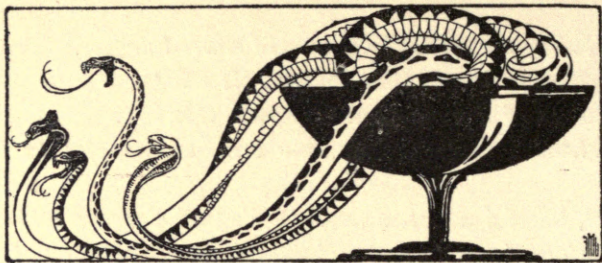
*We were a nation once, were proud and brave,
In freedom's intense fight our heart's-blood freely gave
Until by treacherous and foul cabal were slain:
The outlook for a glorius future then saw to wane ...
But we are Jews! We are the race of Maccabees!
Where is the man whose manly pride this doth increase,
On whom this pride of race doth still sweet bliss bestow?
Once upon a time, long, long ago.*

*Is there one who shall kindle into flame this pride,
And for this glory of the past to fight decide?
Will he; who had escaped and safely reached the shore,
Not of his brethren left behind think any more?
Who's not a sycophant who learned to crawl and whine,
But proudly shall exclaim; this glorious past is mine!
My future life shall ne'er to man a tribute owe!
Once upon a time, long, long ago!*

*Dark shadows like we move, forever move and go,
The pictures of the past grow pale and ever grow
More pale. His sire had been a hero brave indeed,
Howe'er the faithless son abjures his race and creed.
The tide of indolent, voluptuous desire
Drags him into the whirlpool's defiling mire.
Where is the thought which brings times' embers to a
glow?
Once upon a time, long, long ago.*

The future's veiled, still I behold some things:
Enthusiastic inspiration spreads its wings,
The stars of a more glorious epoch rise,
The hearts, once dulled, now look all hopeful to the
 skies;
Peace, blissful peace, unfurls its flag all o'er the earth,
A glorious dawn to a new, bright, light morn gives birth,
Renewing life, which shall with blessings overflow!
And we shall have again the days of long ago!





At the Red Sea.

*Shall we be scared when waves are towering high,
And wildly skyward rolls the tide of blood?
Who trod the stormswept paths with danger nigh,
Shall we be cowed by seething, boiling flood?
The long nights' ghastly fight is done, we von!
Of painful doubt and mournful fear now free,
Up! Let us sing to Him, the Only One,
At the Red Sea.*

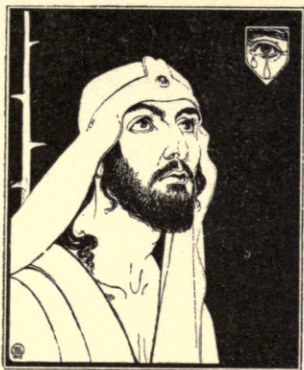
*Midst foaming, roaming surge we onward pressed
When hunted by the wrath of servitude,
Of faith sublime and confidence possessed
Between the sea walls we our paths pursued.
It seemed a phantom legion had begun
Surrounding us, but with a stout heart we
Entoned a song to Him, the Only One,
At the Red Sea.*

*Undaunted and erect we went ahead,
We heard the mocking laughter of the horde,
Met dangers fierce, met tempests fell and dread,
Met martyr's death on stake, by fire and sword.
The blazing flames leaped up towards the sun,
Its ghastly red o'erspread the sky, but we
Entoned a song to Him, the Only One,
At the Red Sea.*

*A thousand dangers were our daily sight,
The headman's axe now, then the hangman's rope,
But boldly we passed through the darkest night,
Our hearts' blood drenched hill's summit and hill's
— slope.
Hark to the rushing blood of sire and son,
What cared they if to die was fate's decree?
They sang a song to Him, the Only One,
At the Red Sea.*

*Shall we be scared when waves are towering high,
And wildly skyward rolls the tide of blood?
Who-trod the stormswept paths with danger nigh,
Shall we be cowed by seething, boiling flood?
The long nights' ghastly fight is done, we won!
Of painful doubt and mournful fear now free,
Up! Let us sing to Him, the Only One,
At the Red Sea.*





And if Tomorrow.

*And should tomorrow ask of you your son
What happened then?
Tell him how great death's harvest then had been.
The reaper's sweep in thousand spots was seen,
And mighty heaps of dead were seen anon.*

*And should tomorrow ask of you your son
What happened then?
Tell him a fierce ordeal ruled o'er the earth,
Life had not of dust or ashes worth,
O'er fields accursed was heard death's antiphon.*

*And should tomorrow ask of you your son
What happened then?
Tell him that men destroyed what men had built;
The widow's home, and homes with orphans filled,
And daily o'er fresh wrecks mourn moon and sun.*

*And should tomorrow ask of you your son
What is to come?
Tell him that hope our hearts uphold,
Man shall more precious be than Ophir's gold,
The voice of our God speaks to every one.*





And some day.

*And some day there shall be a great Passover feast,
Around white, bounteous tables sit, in cushioned chairs
The sires and sons; howe'er now new legends are theirs,
Their bread no more is dough which hath no yeast
And now no longer bitter herb and paschal lamb they eat.*

*The springtide's dewy stars on treetops shine,
To marvel at the feast the sun stood still,
And floods of saintly rays the souls of all men thrill.
A song's heard: "Hail! Hail! Hail! Freedom Divine!"
Henceforth man may in man a brother greet.*

*Foregiveness decendeth to the Pharaohs,
And absolution comes to murd'rous Cains:
Not serfdom and not blood is what henceforth reigns,
Eternal lamp's light in peace-temple glows,
The dead go in eternal life to meet.*

*Yea of destructions bane the earth be free,
For sins of past all hearts atonement make,
We'll hear no more of gallows, gaol or stake,
A song's heard: "Hail! Hail! Hail! Sweet Liberty!"
And henceforth man may man as brother greet.*



A Hungarian Hebrew Poet.

»THE JEWISH CHRONICLE«

London, Dec. 21. 1920.

Special notice is being taken of the twentieth anniversary of his entry into literature, and his tenth anniversary as editor, of Dr. Joseph Patai, editor-in-chief of the Hungarian Jewish paper *Mult és Jövő*. He was born in 1882, and, after studying at a Yeshibah, entered the University of Budapest. Already at the age of 18 he had published a volume of Hebrew poems, the first to appear in Hungary for half a century. A year later he became associate editor of the Jewish weekly *Egyenlőség*, and graduated as Doctor of Philosophy at the age of 25. His ability was recognised by the Government, which sent him to Oxford to study manuscripts of mediaeval Hebrew poets. The fruits of his researches appeared in a two-volume anthology, which traced the development of Hebrew poetry from the earliest times to the present day. He acquired fresh fame by Magyar translations of Jehuda Halévy. His masterpiece is the "Kabbala," depicting the mental struggles and mystic conceptions

of the Chassidim. Ten years ago Dr. Patai founded the Mult és Jövő— "Past and Future"— in which he has been a protagonist in the cause of his people, and which has been the medium for making known to the outer world of Hungary and the surrounding countries the treasures of Jewish learning and culture.

[A portrait of Dr. Patai was given in last Wednesday's Jewish World.]

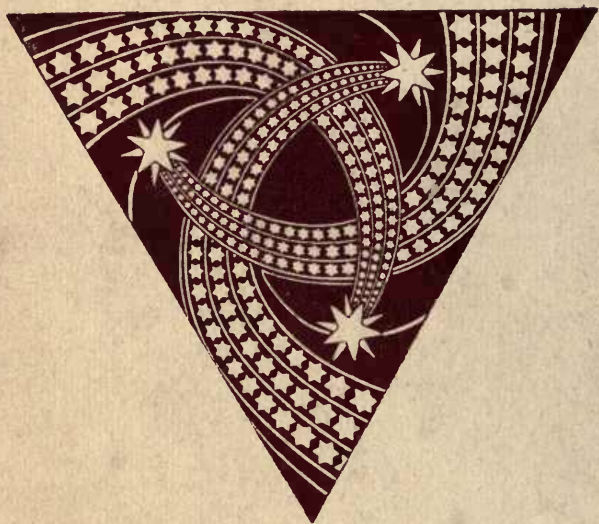
Dr. Joseph Patai ranks high as a poet in Hungary, and has done much to propagate a knowledge of Hebrew Science and Art.

»THE JEWISH WORLD«

Dec. 19. 1920.



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